

# The National Support Element in Hungary

By BRUCE CASTKA



Taszar barracks,  
Hungary

55th Signal Company, Combat Camera (Larry Aaron)

In autumn 1995, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) sought an efficient and expeditious means to insert the American portion of Implementation Force into the former Yugoslavia. Several options were reviewed to include using ports along the Croatian coast to land the force from the sea. Since the majority of personnel and equipment would come from Germany, a decision was made to use a land bridge through Austria, Hungary, and Croatia over rail and road networks. As a peace agreement became more probable, USAREUR and V Corps conducted reconnaissance to locate a staging base in Hungary as far forward to the area of operations as possible.

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It was important that the Hungarian government, military, and people accept this mission. Accordingly, 353d Civil Affairs Command was called upon to support civil-military operations at USAREUR Forward (FWD) headquarters, secure civil-military cooperation between U.S. forces and the Hungarian body politic, and win the support of the local population for Joint Endeavor.

V Corps G-5 took the lead in gaining requisite support from a country which only recently had been ruled by a communist regime and was somewhat skeptical of a foreign military presence. After considering several sites, Hungarian facilities in the Kaposvar/Taszar region were selected. This area was chosen for its airfield, installations, and other assets that could support a logistical sustainment force. In

addition, it is situated on a major north-south road network leading to Barcs and the Sava River crossing into Croatia at Zupanja. The railhead of Dombovar is also nearby. In early December 1995 U.S. forces began landing in C-130s at Taszar. Among the first elements to arrive was the V Corps G-5 staff, which immediately met with leaders in Kaposvar/Taszar.

It was essential that the Army immediately develop a capability in Hungary to support the deployment. Although years of NATO planning had included discussions of multinational logistic support operations, that option was not adopted for this operation. The British and French forces, which had been previously deployed in Bosnia, had logistical supply lines in place, with Split as the primary port of entry in Croatia. They were therefore assigned to southern Bosnia, the British in the southwest and French in the south. Having no previous ground presence, the United States was assigned to the north with headquarters at Tuzla. Moving tons of matériel overland became a challenge for USAREUR FWD with its forward support base at Taszar.

Given the significance of civil-military cooperation in Hungary, USAREUR requested a full civil affairs complement with a lead element arriving early in the new year. By the end of January 1996, CA Reservists were on-site and deployed in small, functional tactical support teams. Several were fluent in Hungarian or had professional expertise relevant to the deployment area.

Teams were located at strategic points where the potential for misunderstandings with local people was the greatest. One was attached to 29th Area Support Group at Taszar, a farming village astride a major U.S. installation. Others were assigned to the critical main support route at Barcs, Hungary, and 1st Armor Divisional Support Command at Slovanski Brod, Croatia. Another team was assigned to a training site set up by 7th Maneuver Training Command at Taborfalva, Hungary. These teams focused on supporting the local population as dozens of convoys carrying everything from food and water to Abrams tanks rolled through the frozen countryside.

Hungarian engineers  
near Sarajevo.



55th Signal Company, Combat Camera (Jean-Marc Schalle)

## Glossary of Terms

ACE	Allied Command Europe
ARRC	ACE Rapid Reaction Corps
CA	civil affairs
CIMIC	civil-military cooperation
GFAP	general framework agreement for peace
IFOR	Implementation Force
IO	international organization
IPTF	International Police Task Force
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PEC	Provisional Election Commission
PVO	private voluntary organization
UNHCR	U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees
USAREUR	U.S. Army Europe

Three additional CA teams functioned in direct support of USAREUR FWD. One formed a civil-military operations center at the tactical operations center at Taszar which conducted 24-hour operations seven days a week. It served as the civil affairs eyes and ears of the tactical operations center advising USAREUR FWD on all matters pertaining to deployment and employment of CA forces in theater. They kept the commanding general of the

national support element current on their status and role in supporting civilian agencies responsible for implementing the peace accords.

The second team conducted civil-military liaison at the county center office complex located in downtown Kaposvar. It was there that the Army coordinated with the commercial infrastructure for support. Hungarian civilians made offers to provide all classes of supply and services—from vehicle repair to dry-cleaning—which were forwarded to Army contracting. Trade shows permitted contact with vendors, establishing strong links with the local economy.

The third team conducted an active campaign to influence the public. It traveled throughout southern Hungary visiting 75 schools and 40 town governments. Meetings from the kindergarten through high school level were highly effective in communicating U.S. objectives to students and their parents. Hungary also has flourishing media outlets (print and television) and our soldiers made news wherever they went. Through press conferences, talk shows, and local

newspapers, CA personnel fostered support, particularly in critical operational areas as American troops rolled south during the winter. When concerns arose over their activities, the local political establishment turned to assigned CA teams to resolve them. The issues that surfaced were quickly brought to the attention of USAREUR FWD for action.

Within ninety days the Army safely deployed 20,000 soldiers into its area of responsibility. Bolstered by the national support element in Hungary, American troops brought a total cessation of hostilities within their sector. Hungary, which now is being considered for membership in NATO, was pivotal to that success. Its cooperation was evident throughout the mission and is attributable, at least in part, to efforts by the civil affairs teams that sustained host nation support. The unique skills of CA personnel were ideally suited to generating effective civilian-military cooperation and accomplishing the vital mission of securing peace in the Balkans.

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